

## NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS, DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES



Natalie Zemon Davis is Adjunct Professor of History and Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto and Henry Charles Lea Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton University. Regarded as one of the greatest living historians, she has expanded the boundaries of social history by studying previously neglected areas significantly transforming the study of early European history. Over the course of her sixty-year career, she has distinguished herself as a fearless writer and innovative scholar through a wide range of scholarship that includes the history of early modern Europe, North Africa, the Caribbean, Judaism, and women and gender issues.

Professor Davis grew up in Detroit, Michigan, in the shadow of World War II and was one of the few Jewish students in her class. She developed a passion for history at an early age. After graduating from Kingswood School Cranbrook, she went to Smith College, where she became concerned with issues of racism, union rights, and free speech and read extensively about the Italian Renaissance and the English and French Revolutions. She completed her degree in 1949 and went on to earn a master's degree from Radcliffe College in 1950 and a doctorate from the University of Michigan in 1959.

During this time she began to recognize the important role that ordinary people play in history and her focus shifted from the history of ideas to social history. She also became strongly influenced by the work of social anthropologists. Using nontraditional research materials such as letters, theater documents, bank documents and travel records, Professor Davis has crafted narratives to reconstruct the lives of people in the past and reshape our understanding of those cultures.

The author of numerous books and articles, Professor Davis is perhaps best known for *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), which recounts a celebrated French court case and was also the basis for a film of the same title, for which she served as a consultant. In her first book, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975), she took readers into the lives of peasants and artisans to offer a fresh understanding of the changes in society at the time. Her work offers new insights into the past and continually challenges one-sided interpretations and narrow viewpoints.

Professor Davis's thirty-eight years of teaching included positions at Brown University, the University of California at Berkeley, Yale University, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and Balliol College in Oxford, in addition to Princeton University and the University of Toronto. Her interdisciplinary courses integrated her social, anthropological, ethnographic, and literary interests and have inspired many historians to follow their curiosity and find new ways of recounting history.

She has been active in defending human rights and especially effective in speaking against domestic and foreign repression of dissent and of intellectual freedom. In 2010, she was awarded the Holberg International Memorial Prize. She has won dozens of other honors, including the Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities from Princeton University (1983), and the Smith College Medal (1996). Most recently, she was named a Companion of the Order of Canada in 2012. She has served as President of the American Historical Association and President of the Society for French Historical Studies.